

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RABAT 05598 101226Z
ACTION NEA-10

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O R 101100Z OCT 77
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3338
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 5598

STADIS//////////

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SP AG SS
SUBJECT: HEARINGS ON SPANISH SAHARA

REF STATE 242477

1. IN RESPONDING TO ANY QUERIES ALONG LINE OF THOSE IN PARA
7 REFTEL, DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO DRAW ON FOLLOWING.

2. RE PARA 7A, THIS ISSUE IS IN DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES.
IN KEEPING WITH OUR NEUTRALITY, WE HAVE AVOIDED TAKING POSITIONS
ON ALL THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES IN THE DISPUTE. OUR AIM IS TO
AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH WOULD EXACERBATE CURRENT TENSIONS IN
THE AREA. OUR HOPE IS THAT THE PARTIES CONCERNED WILL REACH
A SETTLEMENT WITHOUT SUPER-POWER INVOLVEMENT.

3. THE USG HAS AVOIDED TAKING A POSTION ON SAHARAN SELF-
DETERMINATION ALSO BECAUSE OF SEVERAL UNIQUE AND HIGHLY CONFUSING
ELEMENTS. THE GOM CLAIMS, OF COURSE, THAT CONSULTATION OF THE
POPULATION HAS ALREADY OCCURRED AS A RESULT OF THE FEBRUARY 1976
VOTE OF THE JAMAA (SPANISH-CREATED TERRITORIAL ASSEMBLY OF
NOTABLES), AS WELL AS LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER 1976 AND
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN JUNE 1977 IN WHICH SAHARANS STILL
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RESIDENT IN THE TERRITORY TOOK PARTY. IN ADDITION, KING HASSAN
HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT HE IS WILLING TO CODUCT A FURTHER CON-
SULTATION ON CONDITION THAT CALM BE RESTORED IN THE SAHARA
THROUGH CESSATION OF ALGERIAN-SUPPORTED GUERRILLA WARFARE AND
THAT SPAIN PROVIDE DETAILS OF 1974 CENSUS OF SAHARAN PUPULATION
AS BASIS FOR THE CONSULATION.

4. PERHAPS AS MUCH AS HALF OF THE SAHARAN POPULATION, HOWEVER, IS LOCATED IN TINDOUF AREA IN REFUGEE CAMPS. THE REASON FOR THEIR PRESENCE THERE IS STRONGLY CONTESTED, WITH ONE SIDE CLAIMING THEY WERE FORCED TO GO THERE AND ARE BEING HELD AGAINST THEIR WILL, AND THE OTHER SIDE MAINTAINING THEY FLED FROM THE MOROCCAN ARMY. WHATEVER THE CASE, THEY HAVE BECOME HIGHLY POLITICIZED DURING THEIR MISERABLE TWO-YEAR EXISTENCE IN THE CAMPS. A FURTHER CONFUSING FACTOR IS THAT THERE ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY OTHER, NON-SAHARAN REFUGEES IN THE CAMPS. BOTH SIDES HAVE WAGED EXTENSIVE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE REFUGEES, BUT IT IS PERHAPS NOTEWORTHY THAT TO DATE THE ALGERIANS HAVE NOT PERMITTED UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES TO RESIDE IN TINDOUF AREA OR TO CONDUCT A CENSUS AND CATEGORIZE THE REFUGEES, AN ESSENTIAL PRECONDITION TO ANY SUBSEQUENT CONSULTATION.

5. WHILE WE ARE NOT FULLY CONVERSANT WITH THE DETAILS OF THE EAST TIMOR PROBLEM, ONE ELEMENT WHICH SETS THE TWO SITUATIONS APART IS THAT MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA, AS A RESULT OF THE MADRID ACCORD AND UNGA'S SUBSEQUENT NOTING OF IT, HAVE A LEGAL BASIS FOR THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE PRESENCE IN THE TERRITORY. THE US HAS TO DATE WITHHELD JUDGMENT ON THIS OR OTHER JURIDICAL ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM IN THE HOPE THAT THE CONTENDING PARTIES, WITH WHICH WE HAVE IMPORTANT RELATIONS, CAN SETTLE THE MATTER IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT. THIS CONTINUES TO BE THE POSITION WHICH THE USSR, MOST OF THE ARABS, AND VIRTUALLY ALL OF

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WESTERN EUROPE HAVE ADOPTED TO DATE.

6. RE PARA 7B, WE WOULD CONSIDER USE OF US-SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT IN THE SAHARA OR MAURITANIA AS HAVING BEEN OF LIMITED EXTENT. THE SAHARA CONFLICT IS A LOW-LEVEL GUERRILLA WAR, AND THE MAJOR ITEMS OF US-ORIGIN MATERIAL IN THE MOROCCAN INVENTORY ARE NOT WELL SUITED FOR HIT-AND-RUN SKIRMISHES IN THE DESERT. (FYI - F-5 FIGHTERS ARE BEING USED IN THE SAHARA, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THIS WEAPONS SYSTEM HAS BEEN FOUND INEFFECTIVE IN ANTI-GUERRILLA OPERATIONS AGAINST THE POLISARIO AND CURRENT MISSION IS SOLELY RECONNAISSANCE.) THE MAJOR ITEMS OF US EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED UNDER THE MOROCCAN ARMY MODERNIZATION PROGRAM (M-48 TANKS AND M-113 APC'S), AS WELL AS 16 US-ORIGIN 155MM SELF-PROPELLED HOWITZERS TRANSFERRED LAST YEAR FROM IRAN, ARE KNOWN TO BE LOCATED WITHIN MOROCCO PROPER, NOT THE SAHARA.

7. INASMUCH AS GUERRILLA ATTACKS EXTEND TO BOTH MAURITANIA AND SOUTHERN MOROCCO, AS WELL AS THE SAHARA, IT APPEARS LEGITIMATE TO VIEW MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN ANTI-GUERRILLA OPERATIONS AS SELF-DEFENSE. THERE IS, OF COURSE, A FORMAL DEFENSE AGREEMENT BETWEEN MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA. THE

MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES HAVE NOT RESORTED TO HOT PURSUIT OF GUERRILLAS RETURNING TO ALGERIA AFTER MILITARY OPERATIONS IN MOROCCO AND THE SAHARA, AND IN CONDUCTING MILITARY SWEEPS HAVE MOVED FROM EAST TO WEST TO AVOID ANY SEMBLANCE OF THREAT TO ALGERIA.

8. RE PARA 7C, WE BELIEVE THIS ALLEGATION IS SIMPLY UNTRUE. WHILE WE ARE UNAWARE OF THE NATURE OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES MANEUVERING AT THE TIME IN NEW YORK, IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT THE USG SUPPORTED SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION FULLY.

9. DEAN OF LAW FACULTY OF MUHAMMAD V UNIVERSITY IN RABAT, MOHAMED BENNOUNA, LEFT SUDDENLY FOR THE US ON OCTOBER 9, POSSIBLY TO TAKE PART IN THE HEARINGS.
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